DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 168 346 FL 010 198

AUTHOR	Wolfson, Nessa; Manes, Joan
TITLE	Don't Dear Me. Working Papers in Sociolinguistics, No. 53.
INSTITUTION	Southwest Educational Development Lab., Austin, Tex.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	Jan 79
NOTE	31p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 211 East Seventh Street, Austin, Texas 78701
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	American English; Females; Interaction Process Analysis; *Language Research; Language Role; Language Styles; *Language Usage; *Language Variation; Psycholinguistics; Regional Dialects; Sex Role; *Social Attitudes; *Sociolinguistics; *Speech Communication; Speech Habits; Standard Spoken Usage; Verbal Communication
IDENTIFIERS	*Sexist Language

ABSTRACT

The factors that are involved in the choice of address to women as compared to men by speakers of American English were investigated in public interactions regarding provision of a service. In addition to proper names, there are two major types of address forms in general usage: the traditional respect forms, such as "ma'am" and "sir," and the so-called terms of endearment. A third possibility is that people may avoid using any address form at all. It was found that two of the three major address types occurring in service encounters can be and are used in absolutely parallel fashion to men and women. The use of the third address type, terms of endearment, in a non-reciprocal pattern paralleling its use by adults to children, carries the implication that the addressee is in some way subordinate to the speaker. Cases were found in which women were addressed by these intimate forms while men were not, but the opposite was not found. (SW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED168346

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Joan Manes

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

Working Papers in Sociolinguistics

SOUTHWEST EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT LABORATORY
211 East 7th Street
Austin, Texas 78701

The *Working Papers in Sociolinguistics* series is produced by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory with funds from the National Institute of Education, Department of Health, Education & Welfare. The content of these papers do not necessarily reflect DHEW policies or views.

Richard Bauman
Joel Sherzer
EDITORS
The University of Texas, Austin

James H. Perry
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Southwest Educational Development Laboratory

For further information contact:

OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS
SEDL
211 East 7th Street
Austin, Texas 78701

Don't Dear Me

Nessa Wolfson
University of Pennsylvania

Joan Manes
University of Virginia

Sociolinguistic Working Paper

NUMBER 53

January, 1979

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory

211 East Seventh Street

Austin, Texas

Publisher's Note

This article will soon appear in Borker, R., Furman, N. and McConnell-Ginet, S. (editors), Language in Women's Lives

Don't Dear Me

Nessa Wolfson
Joan Manes

"Hey, dear, can you type an envelope?"

The choice of a form of address is one of the ways in which speakers of American English may express and, indeed, influence their own status in relation to that of others. As Hymes (1974: 111) has pointed out:

> One value of terms, or modes, of address as a focus is that it makes so clear that the relation of linguistic form to social setting is not merely a matter of correlation. Persons choose among alternative modes of address, and have a knowledge of what the meaning of doing so may be that can be formally explicated.

In addition to proper names, there are two major types of address forms in general usage: the traditional respect forms, such as "ma'am" and "sir"; and the so-called terms of endearment. A third possibility, however, exists; people may simply avoid using any address form at all. When a woman is addressed in a public situation (e.g., by a salesclerk, a waitress, a gas station attendant) where her name is not known, one of these three must be chosen. The primary concern of this study is to investigate and evaluate the factors which are involved in this choice.

There has been a growing interest over the past few years in the way the use of language reflects women's status. All too many of the studies which focus on this issue have suffered from a lack of data from everyday conversational interactions, a problem which is not infrequent in studies of other aspects of language in society. However useful intuitions may be for suggesting hypotheses, it is only through empirical investigation that one may hope to ascertain the validity of one's suppositions.[1] As Wolfson (1967: 119)

has pointed out, "only observation can be used to collect the range and breadth of data which we must have to study a variable adequately." Because our interest was in the way in which people make use of certain linguistic elements in their interactions with one another, and in what the choice of one element over another in a particular type of interaction might mean, it was essential to observe and record data from such interactions as they occurred in everyday situations. In no other way could we obtain the information needed to analyze the factors that might be involved in the choice.

The major public speech situation in which individuals, including total strangers, participate on a regular basis, is that which may be broadly categorized as service encounters. Merritt (1976: 321) defines a service encounter as "an instance of face-to-face interaction between a server who is 'officially posted' in some service area and a customer who is present in that service area, that interaction being oriented to the satisfaction of the customer's presumed desire for some service and the server's obligation to provide that service." We would like to expand this definition to include any encounter in which a service is performed for a fee or in expectation of such. This will allow us to treat within this category such interactions as those between a nurse and a patient or between a potential customer and a salesclerk over the telephone. It is because nearly all of the adult population in our society is regularly involved in some sort of service encounter that these speech situations provide the researcher with such a rich source of information about the way people address one another. Furthermore, the public nature of the service encounter makes it particularly amenable to observation by the researcher.

Observation of service encounters and of the forms of address occurring within them was carried out by means of three major techniques. The

researchers, with the aid of a number of colleagues,[2] observed and recorded the forms of address used to them in a wide range of service encounters in which they participated. Address forms in transactions which occurred within the hearing of observers, but in which they did not themselves participate, were also carefully recorded. Finally, as a way of checking the data which had already been gathered, a systematic survey of responses to telephoned requests and inquiries was made. Using these three techniques, information on more than 800 interactions was recorded.[3] Over 80% of these are service encounters. The rest represent a variety of interactions between friends, acquaintances, co-workers and strangers. Although our focus is on service encounters, these additional data were found to be most helpful in clarifying points about the use and meaning of the address forms occurring in service encounters.

The first and third methods, in which the researcher is also a participant, present no difficulties of either an ethical or a practical nature. The collection of forms of address, and frequently entire transactions, which the researcher merely overheard, may need some further discussion. From a practical point of view, the ease of collecting such data varies from place to place and from situation to situation. For example, at a gas station, unless it is self-service, the customers usually remain in their cars, and it is difficult to hear what is going on around one, even at a comparatively busy time of day. On the other hand, at many department stores, it is a simple matter to sit down in an armchair, which is generally available for people waiting for customers to complete their business, and listen and write in a small notebook. No one pays the slightest attention, and the chair is frequently conveniently placed near the cash register. From an ethical point of view, it should be noted that all conversational interchanges which were

collected took place in public such that, one, the researcher's presence was perfectly obvious to the participants and, two, the nature of the interaction was in no sense personal. Furthermore, as Wolfson (1976b: 207) has stated: ". . . the investigator is looking only at speech forms; he neither knows nor cares who the participants are and his observing has nothing to do with gathering information specific to individuals."

As was pointed out earlier, when a woman is addressed in a public situation, specifically a service encounter, the speaker has three basic choices: to use the traditional respect form "ma'am"; to use a term of endearment (e.g., "honey", "dear"); to use no overt form of address whatever. There are other possibilities, of course. The addressee's name may be known to the speaker, either because she is a regular customer or because of the nature of the encounter itself (e.g., a hotel clerk addressing a guest), and either first name or title plus last name (e.g., Mrs. Jones) may be selected as the address form. In addition, there are terms such as "miss", "ladies", and "girl", which are somewhat less frequent in occurrence. Our attention, however, will be focused on the three major choices mentioned above. For the sake of simplicity, we shall refer to all three as address forms, and specifically to the lack of an overt form as the zero address form. This is not a totally unjustified usage since, as we shall see below, the choice of no form at all, the zero form, is in direct contrast to the choice of either "ma'am" or a term of endearment and therefore the lack of an address form is itself meaningful.[4]

It is not simply the case that all three forms are available when a woman is addressed in the course of a service encounter; what is much more significant is the fact that all three can be shown to occur in functionally equivalent situations, to form, in effect, part of a paradigm. Indeed, as anyone

who ever goes shopping can easily verify, the formulae:

1. Can I help you, dear?

2. Can I help you, ma'am?

3. Can I help you?

are so much part of the traditional exchange that one hardly bothers to notice which has been said. The use of these forms in functionally equivalent ways is not limited by any means to such traditional formulae. When one of the researchers called shoe stores in the Philadelphia area to ask whether they carried girls' saddle shoes, she received, among others, the following responses:

4. No, I'm positive we don't have them in stock.

5. No, I can't help you, ma'am.

6. I don't believe we have them here, hon.

It may seem counterintuitive that a respect form such as "ma'am" and a term of endearment such as "hon" or "dear" could occur in truly identical situations. To show that this is indeed the case, let us consider the following two exchanges which occurred in two very similar delicatessens in the same suburb of Philadelphia. In each case the same customer was being served.

7. A: Yeah, can I have four special hot dogs?
   B: Anything else, dear?

8. A: I'd like a small sliced rye.
   B: Here you are, ma'am. Anything else?

The second example comes from a longer exchange which is particularly interesting in that the very same salesclerk, speaking to the very same customer, switched address forms during the interaction:

9. A: Can I help you, ma'am?
   B: I'd like a small sliced rye.
   A: Here you are, ma'am. Anything else?
   B: Some herring in cream sauce, please.
   A: How many do you want? One? Two? Three? Four? Five? Six?
   B: (to friend: Two, Joan?) Two, please.
   A: (big smile) Here you are, dear. You're a good friend.

Not only does this prove that both forms can indeed occur in the very same interaction, but it also provides an excellent example of how their use expresses different social meanings, as discussed below.[5]

It is a basic principle of sociolinguistics that wherever two or more forms can occur within the same frame with no change of referential meaning, any difference in their usage will carry social meaning. As Gumperz (1970:206) says, speaking of the use of title plus last name, first name, or "boy" to an adult black man:

> Use of one term or another does not change the nature of the message as a form of address; but it does determine how the person addressed is to be treated, and to what social category he is to be assigned. Selection among such grammatically equivalent alternants thus serves social rather than linguistic purposes.

(In this regard, cf. also Ervin-Tripp 1969: 17-24). What, then, are the social meanings associated with the choice of one of the three forms of address under discussion?

"Ma'am" is a conventional respect form for addressing women. As we have seen, it can occur within the formula which initiates a service encounter. It may also be used thorughout the encounter, whether or not it occurs in the initial utterance.

10. A: Yes, ma'am, fill 'er?
    B: Yes, please, regular.
    A: Regular? Okay.
    A: (later) Ten twenty-five.
    B: Would you check the oil, please?
    A: You're a quart low, ma'am.
    A: (later) Eleven-fifty. (B hands him the money) Thank you, ma'am.

11. A: What can I get you to drink before lunch?
    B: Nothing, thanks.
    A: Nothing at all, ma'am?
    B: No, thanks.

12. A: Do you have shorts for him?
    B: Shorts? Everything I got is on that rack.
    A: Here?
    B: Yes, ma'am.

The first of these occurred in Charlottesville, Virginia; the third occurred in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; the second occurred on a Delta Airlines flight between Philadelphia and New Orleans. Clearly the form is used in such interactions in both the northeast and the south. However, the frequency and distribution of the form shows strong regional differences.

If we consider all interactions in which either "ma'am" or some term of endearment was used, we find that in the south 68.5% of the speakers used "ma'am", while only 31.5% used a term of endearment. Speakers in the northeast, on the other hand, used "ma'am" only 24.5% of the time and an endearment form 75.5% of the time. The difference is probably even greater than is indicated by these figures, since a fair amount of the southern data was collected by six young women, none over twenty-five, who might be expected by reason of their age to receive more endearments. If their material is omitted from consideration, making the two sets of data more comparable, at least as regards the age of the researchers (who are often, though by no means necessarily, the addressees), the frequency of "ma'am" in the south rises to 83.1% and that of endearment terms drops proportionately to 16.7%. This does not mean, of course, that "ma'am" is used in 83% of all service encounters involving women as customers. We do find some instance of the use of proper names and of certain less common address forms, such as "miss" and "ladies", but these form too small a proportion of the material to be statistically interesting. What is significant, however, is the very frequent occurrence of the zero address form, that is, of no overt address form whatsoever. Unfortunately, complete records of the interactions involving zero address were not consistently kept at all places during the entire period of the investigation. For this reason, it is difficult to make valid comparisons between northeastern and southern use of this form. Data from the

Charlottesville, Virginia area indicate that zero address is used at least half of all service encounters. A small sample from the Philadelphia area suggests that the usage in the northeast may be even higher, around 75%, but the limited size of the sample (43 interactions) precludes our making any definite conclusions. When zero address is taken into account, the difference between the frequency of souther and northeastern use of "ma'am" is even more striking: 40% of all service encounters[6] in the south involve the use of "ma'am" at least once; only 7% of all such encounters in the northeast do so.

This regional difference is confirmed when we consider the sex and relative ages of the speaker and the addressee. In the south, all speakers, male and female, whether they were older, younger or of the same age as the addressee, used "ma'am" more frequently than terms of endearment. In fact, only in the case of older women addressing younger women[7] do we find a noticeable use of terms of endearment as opposed to "ma'am" (44% and 56% respectively). In the northeast, on the other hand, only when the addressee was a woman older than themselves did speakers (male and female) use "ma'am" more frequently than terms of endearment. It seems, therefore, that in the south sex is a stronger influence than age: male service personnel, if they use an overt address form to a woman, use "ma'am" in almost every instance; relative age apparently influences the choice of form significantly only for female speakers who, if they are older than the addressee, fairly frequently select a term of endearment. In the northeast, on the other hand, relative age seems to be the more significant factor of the two: for both men and women, terms of endearment are more frequent than "ma'am" if the speakers is older than the addressee and "ma'am" is more frequent if the speaker is younger. Unfortunately, a more complete analysis of the interrelated effects of sex and age is not possible at this time, due to an insufficiency of data for certain

groups, a problem compounded by the fact that the ages of both the speaker and the addressee may affect the choice of address form independently of their relative ages (e.g., women over a certain age may tend to be addressed with a respect form no matter what their age relative to that of the speaker).[8] In addition, as we shall see below, both the respect form, "ma'am," and terms of endearment may be used in a variety of ways, and it seems unlikely that such factors as age and sex act in the same way in all cases. Similar problems arise in the consideration of the effect of race on choice of address form, and since our data are much less comprehensive for Blacks (both speakers and addressees) than for whites, we have left this question for later consideration.

"Ma'am" is not only found with much greater frequency in the south than in the northeast, it is also found in different contexts and with different meanings. Two uses of "ma'am" which are found in the south do not seem to occur at all in the speech of the northeast.[9] The first is the use of the single term "ma'am," with rising intonation, to indicate that the speaker has not heard or understood what was said, as occurred in the following telephone conversation:

13. A: Could you tell me how late you're open this evening?
    B: Ma'am?
    A: Could you tell me how late you're open this evening?
    B: Until 6.

This use is in contrast to a variety of other forms which occur in both the northeast and the south, such as "pardon" and "I'm sorry":

14. A: You're not open on Sundays?
    B: Pardon?
    A: You're not open on Sundays?
    B: No.

15. A: Do you have rooms for tomorrow night?
    B: I'm sorry?
    A: I said, do you have rooms for tomorrow night?
    B: I can't hear you ma'am.

This last example is particularly interesting because, while the speaker, a reservations clerk in a Philadelphia hotel, used the address from "ma'am" in her second request for repetition, she did not use the southern construction, "ma'am?"

The second use of "ma'am" which is specific to the south is in the phrase "yes, ma'am," which functions as a variant of "you're welcome":

16. A: Could you tell me how late you're open this evening?
B: Until nine.
A: Thank you very much.
B: Yes, ma'am.

17. A: Could you tell me how late you're open this evening?
B: Until five-thirty.
A: Thank you very much.
B: You're welcome.

There also exists a regional difference in the range of extra-linguistic contexts in which the form "ma'am" occurs. In the northeast, "ma'am" is heard almost exclusively in speech situations involving strangers.[10] In the south, on the other hand, certain uses of the form are perfectly appropriate to acquanintances and even intimates. For example, when a graduate student at the University of Virginia brought one of her professors a cup of coffee, the professor responded with "Thank you, ma'am," Similarly, a male colleague of one of the researchers, who is a good deal older than she is and who generally addresses her by first name or a diminutive, responds to direct questions from her with "yes, ma'am" or "no, ma'am," Even more striking to a transplanted northerner, is the young man from South Carolina who, when his wife says something which he does not hear, questions her with "ma'am?"

Although there is no doubt that "ma'am" is a conventional respect form, and would therefore ordinarily be addressed to someone older or of higher status than the speaker, it is clear from the foregoing examples that the use of "ma'am" as an intrinsic part of certain polite formulae is so general in the

south that this constraint is overridden. In fact, for some speakers the use of these formulae seems to be almost automatic. Even in situations such as the following, where the speaker is clearly annoyed at the addressee, who furthermore is not of such status as to command any expression of request from him, the phrase "yes, ma'am" appears three times:

18. A: Mr. Jones?
B: Yes, ma'am.
A: I'm calling for Jonn Smith, who's running in the Democratic primary next Tuesday.
B: Yes, ma'am.
A: May I ask you what you think if Mr Smith?
B: I'll tell you, lady. I'm voting for Jim Brown.
A: Well, thank you very much.
B: Yes, ma'am.

Other speakers may express their annoyance by avoiding the polite address form, switching back to it when they feel their grievance is being attended to:

19. A: Lady, I've spent all morning down here waiting.
B: Did you put your yellow card in the box?
A: Yeah.
B: (looks in box and locates card) Did you want to get these filled out?
A: Yes, ma'am.

Although, as we have just seen, speakers will use the form "ma'am" to persons who are not their superior in either age or status, and will furthermore, on occasion, refuse to use "ma'am" where it might be expected, because of external factors, nevertheless, the general norms for the use of "ma'am" do require that the addressee be of higher status and/or older than the speaker. This is borne out by what at first glance appears to be an anomaly in the data. In a typical service encounter, as has been pointed out by Brown and Ford (1961: 236), the person performing the service is in a position of at least temporary subordination to the person for whom the service is being performed. We would thus expect that if the form "ma'am" is used at all it will be addressed to the customer, and, in general, our data support this expectation.

Waiters, airline stewardesses, salesclerks at Army-Navy stores and at Fifth Avenue department stores, cashiers at supermarkets, all use "ma'am" to their female customers on occasion and do not receive it (or the comparable form "sir"). There are only a very few exceptions, and all but two are easily explicable: in one case, for instance, the customer was in her early teens and her age therefore made it appropriate for her to address the cashier as "ma'am" and inappropriate for her to receive the form herself. In the two clear exceptions, a customer in his or her twenties or thirties addressed a cashier in her fifties as "ma'am," While age may be the relevant factor, when both parties are adults this does not generally override occupational status. In every other encounter recorded, the customer's theoretically superior position is apparently enough to prevent the form "ma'am" being addressed to the salesperson or waitress (although it by no means guarantees the customer's receiving any such form).

There is one situation, however, in which the rule apparently breaks down entirely. Among the interactions recorded at the Albemarle County Department of Social Services, the Virginia Unemployment Commission,[11] and in the waiting room of a hospital out-patient clinic, there are fourteen in which the form "ma'am" appears; in seven cases a receptionist or clerk is addressing a patient or client, in the other seven the patient or client is addressing the clerk or receptionsist. The problem is that a person applying for food stamps or unemployment insurance is not, like the customer in a department store or supermarket, buying anything from the person behind the counter; he or she is not a customer, but an applicant for assistance of some sort. Furthermore, the person waiting on the applicant may be seen as a professional. The status relationship is not the relatively clear-cut one of clerk and buyer, and this is evidenced in the fact that sometimes the clerk will use "ma'am" (or "sir")

and sometimes the applicant will do so. To some extent, the result seems to depend on whether the clerk or receptionist begins with the form "ma'am" or with a zero address form. If the latter, the client has the option of using "ma'am" and frequently does so:

20. A: Yes, ma'am?
    B: I had an appointment with . . .

21. A: Have you been waited on?
    B: Oh, yes, ma'am.

Thus we can see that the use of the form "ma'am" is indeed tied to the relative positions of the participants in the verbal exchange. While in most service encounters there is no necessity for either person to use this from, if it is used it will be addressed to the customer by the person performing the service, who is traditionally seen as having at least temporarily lower status than the customer. When, however, the person performing the service is a professional person or is for some other reason seen as having inherently higher status than the customer or client, the situation becomes confused and either participant may feel it proper to address the other with a respect form.

If the speaker does not, for whatever reason, choose to use the respect form "ma'am," he or she has two basic choices: a term of endearment or the zero address form. As we shall show, terms of endearment have a specific connotation which places them in direct contrast to the form "ma'am." In fact, inherent in the use of any overt address form is the expression of the speaker's view of his or her relationship to the addressee. A speaker of American English, however, has the option of avoiding any such expression of relationship, since the use of address forms is not obligatory. In this respect, the norms governing the forms of address under discussion here parallel those governing the use of titles and proper names. As Brown and Ford (1961: 243) have pointed out in their discussion of the use of first name (FN) versus title plus last name (TLN):

> . . . the norms are not always perfectly clear; graduate students will sometimes be uncertain whether the time has come to use FN to a professor, employees will wonder whether they know their bosses well enough to use the familiar form. When someone is in this region of uncertainty, we find that he avoids the use of any sort of personal name. . . .

In such a case, there is ambiguity because the speaker is unsure of the relative weight to be given to the factors of status and intimacy, and therefore of which form is appropriate. In interactions between strangers, the dimension of intimacy is of course irrelevant, but the zero address form allows the speaker to avoid any expression of relative status. Speakers, in particular service personnel, apparently prefer to use this neutral form, as evidenced by its extremely high frequency of occurrence, especially in the northeast where the formulaic use of "ma'am" is much less common.

The use of zero address, while avoiding any implication of status difference, is not necessarily less polite than the use of "ma'am." In fact, in phrases where "ma'am" often appears as part of a polite formula, its absence may be compensated for by the insertion of additional linguistic material, which lends politeness to the utterance but includes no overt address form. For example:

22. A: Are you open on Sunday?
    B: No, ma'am.

23. A: Are you open on Sunday?
    B: No, we're not.

Of course, whether using "ma'am" or a zero form, the speaker will often elaborate on the initial response. Thus, in answer to the same question, we received answers such as:

24. Yes, ma'am, from twelve to six.

25. Yes, we're open eleven to six tomorrow.

26. No, not at all on Sunday. Till nine-thirty every evening.

What is avoided is a simple, abrupt, "yes" or "no" with no elaboration.

This is not to say that these never occur; we do find exchanges such as:

27. A: Hello, do you carry lawnmowers?
    B: Lawnmowers? Yeah.

28. A: Hello, do you carry lawnmowers?
    B: No, I'm sorry, we don't.
    A: You don't?
    B: No.

Such responses are, however, quite infrequent. Furthermore the majority of them occur in contexts such as that exemplified by the last cited exchange, namely, in answer to a repeated request for the same information. Of close to 150 responses to yes/no questions on the telephone, only twenty-six consisted of a simple, unelaborated "yes" or "no," and of these, only ten were in answer to an initial inquiry. It may be that a request to repeat the same information is seen as an imposition, or it may be simply that a second elaboration is felt to be unnecessary.

As we have just seen, by using the zero address form, speakers can politely avoid any classification of themselves or of the addressee with regard to social status, while the use of "ma'am" implies at least some degree of respect, typically associated with a status difference. As was pointed out earlier, the fact that terms of endearment appear in the same linguistic contexts as "ma'am" and zero places the three types of address forms in contrast. Since there is no difference in referential meaning, the selection of one form over another implies a difference in social meaning. By examining service interactions in which terms of endearment are used, we can see what social function these terms serve, as opposed to the other forms just mentioned.

The data indicate that, for some speakers, terms of endearment represent the standard form of address to all female customers. For example, a saleswoman in a small discount store in Philadelphia addressed a series of customers as "hon":

29. You can tell better when it's on, hon.

30. We don't have a try-on room here, hon. You just have to slip it on.

31. Hon, look at this one. This is very nice--it wouldn't give you a heavy look at all.

At a gas station, again in Philadelphia, one attendant addressed a woman with three separate terms of endearment during a single interaction:

32. A: How much, honey?
(Customer lets keys drop.)
A: Butterfingers.
A: (later) Five twenty-five, dear.
B: Could you check the oil?
A: (does so) It needs two quarts. That'll be five twenty-five.
B: Could you put in the oil?
A: I'm only kidding, If it needed oil I'd put it in.
(Customer hands A the money.)
A: Thanks, hon, have a nice day.

It should be noted that all examples of this standard use occur in data collected in the northeast. While it is obvioulsy not possible to make a definitive statement without observing a large sample of service encounters throughout the country, it is not unlikely that this particular use of terms of endearment is restricted to northeastern speakers. In gas station interactions in Charlottesville, Virginia, the researcher involved in the previous example is routinely addressed as "ma'am," as in this previously cited example:

10. A: Yes, ma'am, fill 'er?
B: Yes, please, regular.
A: Regular? Okay.
A: (later) Ten twenty-five.
B: Would you check the oil, please.
A: You're a quart low, ma'am.
A: (later) Eleven fifty. (B hand him the money) Thank you, ma'am.

The contrast between the two gas station encounters lies not only in the forms of address used. The other differences become clear when we recognize that a service encounter is a speech event which is characterized by certain routines which are necessary for the transaction of the business at hand. In

the first encounter, however, the attendant does not limit himself to these routines. What is specifically noteworthy is the fact that the interaction which includes terms of endearment also includes speech acts,[12] such as teasing and personal comments, which are typically part of speech situations involving intimates rather than strangers. Referring back to the series of encounters at the discount store, we notice that here, too, the speaker combines a term of endearment with a personal comment, in this case an extremely personal one concerning the customer's weight problem.

Neither the use of terms of endearment in service encounters, nor their co-occurrence with "intimate" speech acts,[13] is limited to service personnel for whom these forms are a standard way of addressing female customers. In many cases, a speaker who routinely uses either zero or "ma'am" will switch to a term of endearment for a particular customer or within an encounter. Our data include examples of such switching in the south as well as in the northeast; apparently <u>this</u> use of terms of endearment is not restricted in the same way that the routine use of the forms seems to be. One incident, which was cited earlier in this paper, typifies this switching to a term of endearment within an encounter:

9. A: Can I help you, ma'am?
   B: I'd like a small sliced rye.
   A: Here you are, ma'am. Anything else?
   B: Some herring in cream sauce, please.
   A: How many do you want? One? Two? Three? Four? Five? Six?
   B: (to friend: Two, Joan?) Two, please.
   A: (big smile) Here you are, dear. You're a good friend.

The speaker here begins with what is apparently his standard address form, "ma'am," and his utterances consist entirely if impersonal transactional routines. During the third exchange, however, he takes advantage of the customer's hesitation and starts joking about how many herring she wants; he also switches address forms and ends with the personal comment, "You're a good friend."

This same type of switching may even occur in telephone conversations, as the following example shows:

33. A: Does the doctor have office hours tonight?
B: Yes, he does. He has hours from 7 p.m.
A: From 7 until when?
B: From 7 until he's done, hon.

In this case, the speaker does not shift to a generally less impersonal speech mode; rather, she simply makes use of the term "hon" when answering what she apparently sees as an unnecessary, and possibly even foolish, question.

The use of different forms to different addressees is clearly exemplified by the behavior of a cashier at Woolworth's, as she addressed a series of customers and one of her co-workers:

34. A: Come on over--ma'am, come on over here.

35. A: Yes, they are, ma'am, you'll have to wait till they come in.

36. A: What about a bag, ma'am?

37. A: Oh, here, here, hon, here--got it?
B: Oh, yeah.

38. A: Do you want a separate receipt for this also, ma'am?

39. A: They're three for a dollar.
C: I'll take two more. And I'll show it to you, okay? I don't care what color.
A: Do you have your receipt, hon?
(later)
C: Do you want me to bring it in? I don't want anyone to think I took it.
A: That's all right, hon.

As we can see, "ma'am" is her standard form for addressing customers. In example 37, we see her using a term of endearment, "hon," to address a much younger co-worker. In one instance, however, example 39, she used this same term to a customer, first in pointing out that the receipt needed to be corrected since the customer had changed her mind about how many plants to buy, and second, to reassure the customer that she would not be suspected of

shoplifting. What is particularly interesting here is that the customer to whom the term of endearment was used was obviously a good deal older than the speaker.

An examination of all instances of terms of endearment in our data shows that, when such a term is other than the standard address form for that speaker, its use is generally triggered by something in the interaction which shows the customer to be somewhat less than totally competent. This may be anything from a slight hesitation to a major problem in the transaction. As we have also seen, whether the term of endearment is a standard address form in the service encounter or whether it is triggered by something in the interaction, it frequently co-occurs with speech acts, such as teasing, which are typical of interactions between intimates. This is not surprising, since terms of endearment themselves, of course, as their name implies, are regularly used between intimates.

There is one major difference between the way in which terms of endearment function in service encounters and the way in which they function among friends and family. In service encounters, and indeed, in other interactions between strangers, all the evidence points to the fact that terms of endearment may not be used reciprocally. This rule appears to be in direct contrast to that governing interactions between intimates, by which both parties are free to use these terms. There is, however, one important exception to the rule of reciprocity among intimates. Children do not have the right to address terms of endearment to adults, even their own parents. Adults, on the other hand, use these terms very freely to any and all children. It is not unreasonable to assume that social meanings associated with a term in one set of circumstances are carried over when the term is used similarly in other contexts. When address forms are used non-reciprocally, the implication is

that the speaker and addressee are not equals (cf. Brown and Ford 1961). These facts suggest that, along with any connotation of friendship involved in the use of terms of endearment in service encounters, goes the additional implication that the addressee is subordinate to the speaker in some way, just as a child is subordinate to an adult. This is supported by the fact that proper names in our own language, as well as pronouns in a number of Indo-European languages, have been shown to operate on the same pattern; the form which is exchanged by intimates is also the form used by superiors to subordinates in a non-reciprocal pattern which parallels usage by adults to children and often signifies condescension (cf. Brown and Ford 1961; Brown and Gilman 1960). But how can a cashier at Woolworth's, younger than the customer to whom she is speaking, be regarded as the superior? Looking back at example 39, we recall that the customer had shown herself to be at a loss, and that the cashier was offering guidance and reassurance. In this instance, therefore, the customer is dependent and the cashier in control of the situation. For this reason, the cashier, instead of using the respect form "ma'am," uses a term which indicated precisely the lack of need for any expression of respect. This meaning arises out of the contrast of this form with the respect form "ma'am" and the neutral zero form, combined with the fact that the speaker imposes on the addressee a form which implies intimacy or lack of social distance in a situation which does not allow of reciprocal usage, a behavior normally associated with interactions with children.

In the situation just discussed, the customer had placed herself in a position of helplessness vis-à-vis the cashier. The use of terms of endearment in service encounters, however, is not limited to situations in which the customer shows any such lack of competence. A customer is, in fact, always dependent to some extent on the service personnel, since business

cannot be transacted without their aid. On the other hand, by convention, any person performing a service for any other is assumed to be the subordinate. The service encounter thus involves a certain ambiguity with respect to power. It is this ambiguity which explains why we find, in one and the same situation, two terms with such opposite social meanings. It also explains why terms of endearment can be used even when the customer has given no overt sign of incompetence or helplessness, that is, why such terms can be used as a standard mode of address to female customers. It is interesting that there are speakers who consistently address female customers as "hon," "honey" or "dear", but use the respect form "sir" to their male customers. A waitress in a snack bar, for example, was heard to say to a woman:

40. Honey, she just put this in.

and to a man:

41. How about you, sir?

In a delicatessen, a young man behind the counter addressed a series of customers as follows:

42. What else, dear?

43. What else, hon?

44. It's a little low, sir, is that okay?

45. What else, dear?

46. Can I help you, sir?

It should be noted that all three of the women were considerably older than he was.

Thus male customers are routinely addressed by a respect form, "sir". In contrast, female customers, who, except for their sex, are in exactly the same status relationship to the clerk, not only receive no sign of respect, but indeed receive a form which, as we have pointed out, implies specifically that

no such sign of respect is needed. It might be argued that the speaker is using this form as a gesture of friendliness, and this may indeed be how he himself views it. However, it must be remembered that this supposed friendliness is based on a term which, while implying intimacy, is non-reciprocal. As we have seen, this type of usage implies the subordinate and perhaps even child-like status of the addressee. Futhermore, it should be noted that the same speaker does not use a similar "friendly" form for male customers. It is true that this may not be entirely a personal choice on the part of the speaker; terms of endearment are used infrequently to males in service encounters and apparently never by other males.[14] However, the speaker does choose to make a distinction between male and female customers, using the respect form only to men.

In sum, two of the three major address types occurring in service encounters can be and are used in absolutely parallel fashion to men and women. Both sexes may be addressed using the appropriate respect form, "ma'am" or "sir," or both may be addressed by the zero form. The use of the third address type, terms of endearment, in a non-reciprocal pattern paralleling its use by adults to children, carries, as we have seen, the implication that the addressee is in some way subordinate to the speaker. It is extremely interesting that there are cases in which women are addressed by these "intimate" forms while men are not, but that we do not find the opposite occurring. It is perhaps this which so many women find irritating about the form "dear," to the extent that one of the researchers, long before this project was begun, once angrily responded to a salesclerk, "Don't call me 'dear'!"

FOOTNOTES

1. We wish to express our deep indebtedness to Dell Hymes, who taught us the importance of empirical research.

2. Our thanks go to the following friends, colleagues and students who so kindly contributed data for our study: Joan Atherton, Sharlene Brightly, Rebecca Driver, Edwin E. Erickson, Jenny Glusker, Daniele Godard, C.G. Holland, David Howell, Virginia Hymes, Terry Lewis, F.C. Miller, Gwendolyn Samuels, Neil Smith, Barry Taylor, Paula Vance, Stanley and Stefani Walens, Lauren Wiener, Dan Wolfson, Harvey Wolfson.

3. The actual number is closer to 1,000, but we are excluding from consideration here data which contained only reference forms, no address forms.

4. In the same way, when one is asked a direct question, one may answer with "yes," "no," or "maybe." In addition, it is possible to say nothing. But the very fact that a question has been asked makes silence a response, generally one which is easily interpreted by the questioner. Similarly, the fact that someone is being addressed makes the use of no address form meaningful as, at the very least, the avoidance or rejection of the meanings of any alternative overt forms.

5. All this is not to say that such factors as the type of store and the type of clientele it attracts may not have a strong influence on the selection of particular forms of address. So, too, does the fact that an interaction takes place over the telephone rather than face-to-face. We believe, however, that this is a reflection of the socially meaningful contrastive use of these forms.

6. Excluding the very few which exhibit forms of address other than zero, "ma'am" or endearment terms, as mentioned above.

7. Age should be understood to mean estimated age since neither the investigator nor, for that matter, the speaker can know the exact age of a stranger in a service encounter. Persons whose ages are estimated to be less than ten years apart are considered to be of equal age.

8. The same thing, of course, holds for sex of speaker and addressee, but since we are concerned in this paper only with address to women, the problem does not arise.

9. We are aware, of course, that people who migrate to a different area, and possibly their descendants, may continue to use the forms of their original dialects.

10. Joking usage is one obvious exception.

11. Our thanks to the people in these departments who kindly allowed various researchers to listen to and transcribe data from their interactions.

12. We are using this term as it is defined by Hymes (1972: 56-57).

13. By "intimate" here we mean typically used by such people as family members and close friends.

14. Our only examples of terms of endearment to men are of women addressing young men in their twenties, but our data on address to males are too limited, both in size (less than 90 encounters) and in scope, for us to make any definitive statements. Forms such as "Mack" and Buster" do, of course, exist, and have been discussed in the literature (cf. McConnell-Ginet 1977). Such forms might appear to be the counterpart of terms of endearment used to women. However, our data include no examples whatever of these terms being used in such a way.

REFERENCES

Brown, Roger and Marguerite Ford. 1961. Address in American English. In Hymes, Dell (ed.), Language in Culture and Society. New York: Harper and Row 1964. 234-244. (Reprinted from Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology. 62: 375-385).

Brown, Roger and Albert Gilman. 1960. The pronouns of power and solidarity. In Fishman, Joshua (ed.), Readings in the Sociology of Language. The Hague: Mouton 1968. 252-275. (Reprinted from Sebeok, Thomas (ed.), Style in Language. New York: John Wiley and Sons. 253-276).

Ervin-Tripp, Susan. 1969. Sociolinguistics. In Fishman, Joshua (ed.), Advances in the Sociology of Language: I. The Hague: Mouton 1971. 15-91. (Reprinted from Berkowitz, Leonard (ed.), Advances in Experimental Social Psychology. New York: Academic Press. 91-165).

Gumperz, John. 1970. Sociolinguistics and communication in small groups. In Pride, J.B. and Janet Holmes (eds.), Sociolinguistics. Harmondsworth: Penguin 1972. 203-224. (Originally published as Working Paper Number 33, Language Behavior Research Laboratory, University of California, Berkeley).

Hymes, Dell. 1972. Models of the interaction of language and social life. In Gumperz, John and Dell Hymes (eds.), Directions in Sociolinguistics. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. 35-71.

Hymes, Dell. 1974. Foundations in Sociolinguistics. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

McConnell-Ginet, Sally. 1977. Address forms and sexual politics. Presented at the CUNY Conference on Language and Style.

Merritt, Marilyn. 1976. On questions following questions in service encounters. In Language in Society 5: 315-357.

Wolfson, Nessa. 1976a. The Conversational Historical Present in American English Narratives. Unpublished dissertation. University of Pennsylvania.

Wolfson, Nessa. 1976b. Speech events and natural speech: some implications for sociolinguistic methodology. In Language in Society 5: 189-209.

RELEVANCE STATEMENT: Manes & Wolfson

"Don't Dear Me" is an analysis of several common forms of address as employed in specific kinds of social situations. The paper demonstrates how a range of social meanings is conveyed by the choice of address terms; this will be as true in classrooms as it is in service encounters of the kind studied by Manes and Wolfson. Though there are differences in the social information conveyed when a teacher addresses a child as "dear" in a classroom and a salesperson addresses a grown woman as "dear" in a department store, there are important continuities between them as well, that reveal much about sex roles and social interaction in American society.